

## Consular Section

Consular operations represent a major share of Mission resources and have a high impact on public perceptions of the United States. The more than 350,000 American citizens residing in the Philippines create a substantial demand for consular services ranging from passport issuance to assistance with parental child custody disputes. Manila historically has the second highest volume of immigrant visa applicants in the world and is among the top ten non-immigrant visa issuing posts. The Consular Section maintains a close working relationship with its Department of Homeland Security(DHS) colleagues by meeting weekly with United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) and Visa Security Investigations (VSU) representatives.

### American Citizens Services (ACS)

ACS provides services, protection, and advice and assistance to the estimated 350,000 US citizens who are residing in the Philippines at any given time. The ACS unit is comprised of two managers, five entry-level officers, two Eligible Family Members, and 24 local staff. Last year, the unit processed over 10,000 passport and 2,300 Consular Report of Birth Abroad applications, provided approximately 10,000 notarial services, assisted in more than 900 death cases and 300 welfare and whereabouts cases, and helped nearly 100 U.S. citizens needing repatriation assistance. Our Consular Agency in Cebu provides support and assistance to U.S. citizens in the central and southern Philippines. The most demanding Special Consular Services cases involve complicated medical cases, including medical repatriations; death cases where the U.S. citizen died of other than natural causes; and child custody cases.



ACS local staff talking to an American citizen in Tacloban City after the typhoon Yolanda.

### Immigrant Visa (IV) Unit

Manila's Immigrant Visa (IV) unit is the second busiest in the world, processing an average of 65,000 cases per year. In accordance with U.S. immigration law, most petitions are based on family connections, but we also see a fair number of employment-based petitions, primarily in the healthcare field. Unfortunately, high visa demand means that some Filipinos wait longer than anyone else—over two decades at times. On the other hand, nearly one out every five fiancés petitioned around the world are Filipino—more than 5,000 each year! And with the U.S. Supreme Court striking down key aspects of the Defense of Marriage Act, the IV unit has received dozens of same-sex fiancé petitions in recent months. To manage this workload, our American adjudicators are assisted by a talented team of local staff who provide translation services, cultural insight, and continuous processing support..

## Nonimmigrant Visa (NIV) Unit

Manila is one of the world's largest NIV sections, processing nearly 200,000 NIVs in 2013. The NIV unit is also the world's largest processor of C1/D crew visas with nearly one-third of applicants being seafarers. The NIV Unit currently has a chief, a deputy chief, 12 First and Second Tour officers, and 27 Locally Employed Staff (LES). In addition, NIV employs eight full- or part-time Eligible Family Members (EFMs), who serve as biometric facilitators, including a Consular Assistant and Associate. To provide excellent customer service, NIV employs 12 contract greeters who work in public areas and keep the applicants flowing through the various waiting rooms. NIV maintains routine outreach with the public on visa procedures via our ViSatisfied Voyager public blog, website, and Facebook. Furthermore, we work closely with the Philippine American Education Foundation (PAEF) to promote study in the U.S. and understanding about the student visa process.



**Nonimmigrant visa officers and LES interviewing applicants at the window.**



**FPU hosted a fraud conference at the Hyatt Hotel & Casino with Philippine recruitment agencies.**

## Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU)

Fraud remains endemic in the Philippines, partly spurred on by the desire of applicants to seek jobs and a better life in the United States, where a large number of Filipinos have strong family ties. FPU helps the other consular units to understand trends, and provides resources and support to combat fraud. In the spirit of collaboration, FPU works closely with the fraud prevention efforts of other Embassies, and is an active member of the Law Enforcement Working Group (LEWG) and the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Working Group. The Ambassador has made combating TIP a Mission priority. FPU integrates with other elements of the Mission in an effort to prevent trafficking in persons and labor-related abuses of applicants that can include payment of illegal fees, promises of non-existent jobs, and other labor and wage violations.